

Guide to Writing Inception Reports for International Donors

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Abstract

Donors usually require awardees to submit an inception report (IR) or workplan within a few days or weeks of award. In addition to pre-award and other documents, the IR becomes another key document for activity planning, implementation, coordination, and reporting. The donor's representative (DR) has the opportunity to review and modify the IR which the grantee's (GR) or contractor's (CR) representative revise to meet the DR's expectations and requirements. Success often depends on how clearly, timely, comprehensively, transparently, and realistically the IR is written, negotiated and approved. In the best of cases, the grant application or contract proposal, and grant agreement and project contract includes the basis for the IR, and moreover, the IR becomes a functionally work plan for grant or project activities. A well-written and negotiated IR makes the upcoming project activities go much smoothly than otherwise. Although the IR becomes the most practical governing implementation document for the agreement grant or acquisition contract, it may change or be modified formally or otherwise at the discretion of the DR. It is very important to make the best effort for good working relations to spend best efforts to develop and implement the approved IR.

Introduction

International donors like the Asian Development Bank and the U.S. Agency for International Development usually require grant- or project- awarded grantees and contractors to submit an inception report (IR) or workplan within a few days or weeks of award. In addition to the winning grant application, contract proposal, bid, contract or agreement, the IR becomes another key document for grant- and contract- activity planning, implementation, coordination, and reporting. In addition, the donor's representative (DR) typically has the opportunity to review and modify the IR which the grantee's (GR) or contractor's (CR) representative revise to meet the DR's expectations and requirements. The success of the grant or project often depends on how clearly, timely, comprehensively, transparently, and realistically the IR is written by the GR and CR, and negotiated with and approved by the DR. In the best of cases, the grant application or contract proposal, and grant agreement and project contract include the basis for the IR, and moreover, the IR becomes a functionally work plan for grant or project activities.

Illustrative Inception Report Outlines

The IR outline should be agreed upon by the DR and the GR or CR before the draft is submitted for initial DR review. Various DRs will have their favored tables of content (TOC) and outlines, and may impose limitations to page length of the IR's main text, as well as font sizes and types. Often, DRs impose no limitation on the number and page length of annexes. IR writers should note that DRs often consider "illustrative" approaches, methodologies, data-collection and interview formats, data-analyses and statistical methods, interim or intermediate results, timelines and benchmarks, tables and such as "actual" rather than merely "illustrative."

For example, if the DR-approved IR states, illustrates or implies that the numerical data will be analyzed or presented using Microsoft Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) but the draft final report uses Microsoft Excel instead, or the IR indicates that there will be structured focused and one-on-one interviews, 75 people will be interviewed or four quarters of water samples will be collected and tested but only one-on-one interviews are performed, only 50 people are interviewed or only three sampling events are conducted, the DR will need to approve of the changes.

Some IRs including an initial conceptual or even detailed situational analysis, organizational charts and relationships, preliminary survey and modeling results, literature reviews, and other details which others leave to draft mid-term and draft final reports. Table 1 below is an example of a typical generic IR outline.

Table 1. Example of a Typical Generic Inception Report Outline

Cheerfully color-illustrated cover page
Title page <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Title • Authors • Date • Implementing organization • Relationship statement between donor and grantee or contractor; grant or contract number • Grantee or contractor disclaimer
Executive summary
Table of contents
Abbreviations and acronyms (some donors prefer this to follow the list of appendices or annexes)
Body <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grant or contract introduction, background, intermediate/ interim results, and indicators • Deliverables with proposed table of deliverables and level of effort • Schedule with proposed table of schedule details, including meetings, workshops, interviews, and reporting • Key issues or questions to answer • Data sources, including documents, interviews, meeting and workshops • Methods and limitations with proposed table of issues/ questions, tools, personnel to be interviewed, activities to be observed or implement, and other data sources and collection methods • Report outlines • Implementation team
References
Lists <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Figures • Tables • Appendices or annexes
Appendices or annexes, including scope of work or terms of reference, meeting notes, memoranda of understanding, surveys, list of documents compiled to date, details from the IR body, bibliography, and other useful information not appropriate for the IR body
Glossary if needed, often for uncommon or foreign terms and concepts

Conclusions and Recommendations

Donors usually require awardees to submit an inception report (IR) or workplan within a few days or weeks of award. In addition to pre-award and other documents, the IR becomes another key document for activity planning, implementation, coordination, and reporting. The donor's representative (DR) has the opportunity to review and modify the IR which the grantee's (GR) or contractor's (CR) representative revise to meet the DR's expectations and requirements. Success often depends on how clearly, timely, comprehensively, transparently, and realistically the IR is written, negotiated and approved. In the best of cases, the grant application or contract proposal, and grant agreement and project contract includes the basis for the IR, and moreover, the IR becomes a functionally work plan for grant or project activities. A well-written and negotiated IR makes the upcoming project activities go much smoothly than otherwise. Although the IR becomes the most practical governing implementation document for the agreement grant or acquisition contract, it may change or be modified formally or otherwise at the discretion of the DR. It is very important to make the best effort for good working relations to spend best efforts to develop and implement the approved IR.